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C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 001510

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STATE FOR EAP FOR KELLY AND DALEY, AND DRL
USCINCPAC FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [BM](#) [NLD](#)

SUBJECT: GOB RELEASES 115 POLITICAL PRISONERS

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez. Reason: 1.5 (d).

1. (C) Summary: The GOB released another 115 political prisoners on November 21. The NLD has received the names of 50 NLD members who were released as well as one other who military intelligence mistakenly identified as an NLD member. ICRC received all 115 names. This brings the total number of political prisoners released since the talks began between the NLD and the government to about 550, of which more than 400 have been NLD members. According to NLD spokesman U Lwin, only about 110 NLD members remain in prison. End Summary.

2. (C) The National League for Democracy's spokesman, U Lwin, told Poloff November 22 that his contacts in military intelligence had provided him last night with a list of 51 supposed NLD members who had been released as part of the GOB's announced release of 115 political prisoners on November 21. According to U Lwin, 50 of the 51 were indeed NLD members, though none were particularly high-ranking. Most were "students" (actually individuals who were now 30 to 40 years old after spending years in prison), including the one non-NLD member, who had been swept up with a group of NLD members at the time of their original arrest. Otherwise, the group included only one member of an NLD state-wide executive committee and "two or three" township committee members. None of the 16 NLD MPs were released; neither were any other high profile prisoners (NLD or not) part of the release.

3. (C) U Lwin said that the latest releases, when completely confirmed, would bring the total number of political prisoners released since the start of the talks between Aung San Suu Kyi and the military to about 550, of which more than 400 were members of the NLD. Altogether, he said, there are now only about 110 NLD members still in detention, though that group includes many major figures, including U Win Tin and the 16 NLD MPs.

4. (C) U Lwin noted that some of the press stories on the releases stated that 57 NLD members had been released. So far as he knew, that was not true, but he feared that some NLD members might have been offered their release, but refused to sign the warning given every paroled prisoner. That warning stated that released prisoners could be made to serve the remainder of their sentences, if arrested again on similar charges. U Lwin said that the NLD had told the prisoners that this was not a pledge of good behavior; it was simply part of the procedures for release and that no released prisoners had ever yet been re-arrested. Nevertheless, some prisoners still refused to sign the warning. Hence his concern about the discrepancy in numbers.

4. (C) ICRC's protection officer, Christophe Hartmann, told Poloff that ICRC had received a list of 115 prisoners who had been released from various prisons throughout Burma on November 21. However, the released prisoners had not yet checked in with ICRC. Only when the prisoners had checked in would ICRC be prepared to say that the full release had taken place.

Comment

5. (C) In this case, DCI, the Burmese public relations firm, appears to have gotten its facts right. Apparently, the GOB did release 115 prisoners November 21 though it may take some days to fully confirm that number. According to U Lwin, the release was probably timed to coincide with the UN's consideration of the resolution on Burma and the upcoming SAIS conference on Burma in Washington. It may also have been the first tranche of the 200 to 300 political prisoners Secretary 1 Khin Nyunt told Razali the government may release

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before the close of the year. End Comment.
Martinez